

TO LIVE A LIE

Will Butler runs To Live A Lie records, a grind/fastcore/powerviolence label whose releases have appeared frequently in the MRR review section, from the lovely city of Raleigh, North Carolina. In addition to releasing many laudable bands in that chosen genre, such as Shitstorm and Suffering Luna, Will somehow still finds time to produce his Fastcore Photos zine, coordinates the music zine Don't Be Swindle, not to mention a forthcoming collection of his best photographs will soon be published in book form—if you ask me, that's more than a full day's work. Is Will in some sort of "bonus" time zone where they give out extra hours in the day? If so, I'd like to trade him a Capitalist Casualties seven inch for an extra hour of productive time! Joking aside, I caught up with Will Butler by email to elucidate the story of To Live A Lie records and fill in a bit of background on its main man.

Interview by James Walkley of Don't Be Swindle zine.



MRR: Let's start out with a little background. Did you grow up in the Raleigh area, or nearby? What was your childhood like? I understand that you used to play soccer, but had to take a break from it after you had knee surgery. Tell readers what your life was like prior to starting To Live A Lie.

Oh, there is a lot to that story and all of it is boring! I grew up in Winston-Salem (home of Big Tobacco), which is an hour and a half from Raleigh... very close nearby, but two totally different towns. Growing up, I was odd and awkward in many respects, but deep down I have this weird ego; looking back, I think I was actually fairly cool in my own right. I jumped through phases that would last a couple of months to a couple of years. I was immediately drawn into music really young because I didn't comprehend it in the least. I bought Green Day's Dookie as my first CD, then I slowly fell into the world of punk one band at a time. Shortly after the Green Day album, I got the Offspring's Smash. Right after that, I found a Minor Threat CD, then a TSOL CD and it was all downhill from there! I also picked up a love for industrial music and would listen to Skinny Puppy's Cleanse Fold and Manipulate on repeat and sit in my room jamming out to Ministry's "Psalm 69". I still find a special place for all these albums and I feel like they influenced my tastes later on.

I did play soccer for many years when I was young. In fact, I had a patch sewn on my soccer shorts for every year I played and it ended up completely full by the time I stopped. I got hit with the anti-establishment bug at around seventh grade and started skateboarding a lot. I neglected playing soccer because I'd wake up and skate to the other side of town or hit the doctor's office ledge or go to the old Exxon station, rather than keep up with a sport where I was good at defense. Fast-forward up until a few years ago when I started playing pickup games with friends in town here. I started playing once a week, twice a week. Then I started playing indoor soccer, so I was playing four times a week. It was a ton of fun and I dropped down in weight, but I tore my ACL playing indoors and got both scared and had to take the time to heal. This was all as recent as the TLAL days; I remember getting TLAL skateboards (which brings this response full circle) in the mail right after I got out of surgery.

MRR: Many people who know you are aware that you're vegan straight edge. What led you to straight edge? Were you a vegetarian before committing to veganism? Did you become straight edge through listening to bands like Minor Threat, Youth of Today and the like, or were there other reasons for your choice?

I was initially made aware of straight edge from those aforementioned bands. I got into Minor Threat really early and never stopped caring for them. Recently, I was at my parents' house, where I happened to rifle through my old zine collection, and found four or five DIY zines that were named something like xZineNameX. Back then, I remember thinking that the aesthetic of the X's was cool, and wore X's to school at an early age. It really is weird in retrospect, but I grew up thinking my parents were super strict; when I came into my own, they allowed me to "X-up," wear combat boots to middle school, wear NOFX shirts and attempt to bleach my hair any way I could. Glad I got all that out of my system! Getting back to the question, I never did much drinking or smoking, and I've never done a drug recreationally in my life... it just wasn't a path I was interested in. Another influence on that decision was being stuck in a town known as Camel City, where teenagers not only loved to smoke, but also loved to drink at any moment they could. Straight edge is something I do and never think about. I don't condemn anyone who wants to partake in anything. Veganism is definitely a worthwhile movement and a more important topic than worrying about if someone drinks or not, because veganism involves ethical, ecological and economical concerns. I first became vegetarian for Lent (side note: I was never the most pious person, but why not give something up?) at age sixteen, when I worked at Jersey Mike's. I made myself the biggest meat-stacked sub the day before and never looked back. I went vegan years and years later, but felt so dumb that I'd thought it was so much to give up. I can't imagine going backwards on this path now that I've reached it.

MRR: Rewind the clock back to that one record you held in your hand or band you saw live, that prompted you to start releasing music yourself. What's responsible for sparking your desire to do To Live A Lie and why did you decide on that name? What year did the label officially start and what was your first release?

I started TLAL in 2005 with the Godstomper/Magrudergrind split EP. Prior to putting this out, I had caught the powerviolence record-collecting bug. I hunted after every Neanderthal record I could find, searched high and low for rare Capitalist Casualties jams, looked near and far for Disrupt EPs. I just had to have the next jam like a bug. I grabbed whatever stuff I could off eBay/Skylab/VIX/etc. for as cheap as I could here and there, careful not to break the bank. A lot of the stuff that I found, I still love and jam to this day. That was the spark, really. That spark pushed me into the path of starting Stronghold Distro back in 2003.

My first release resulted from coming across a band by the name of Times For Bears To Dance To and me staying friends with them. These people are in an amazing array of bands now: Shitstorm, Torche, Capsule, shortly Kylesa, Devices—to name a few. Rick and Rlub from the band had talked about doing a Godstomper/Magrudergrind split and were getting me hyped to do a label and put it out with them. Shortly after that, I saw Magrudergrind at Charm City Art Space in Baltimore and was blown away not only by their sound, but also by how nice they were. Ricky and Dub ended up not having enough funds to do the record, so I split released it with the third label—Nuclear BBQ Party. To this day, I keep up with Ricky and Dub—awesome folks. Most of that band has now folded back into Shitstorm and it's also amazing to see how big Torche has gotten.

The record label name comes from back in my punk days. I was in a street punk band called the Dead Body Men and I used to book all our shows through an AIM account by the name of ToLiveALie. When I tried to think of a label name that represented music and me, that was the one I kept coming back to. Sometimes I find it a slightly odd name, but in many respects it means the world to me. It represents my early stages, as well as current stages, of musical interest. Ultimately, it spans a timeline of more than a dozen years.

MRR: After you'd decided to release music and you'd settled on the name, how did you choose to focus on fastcore/grind/powerviolence bands as opposed to, say, doing a label based upon other genres?

Actually, I wonder why I haven't touched on different genres before. I would say that some of the bands I deal with cross boundaries. Regardless, when it comes down to it, I put out records that I would flip out to own. Some might argue that Unholy Grave records are a dime a dozen and TLAL did a few of those...but I saw them play in 2005 and they are totally worth the buckets of releases they produce. Also, grindcore/fast hardcore sounds amazing on an EP format. It is so brief and biting. When I did 62 Trax of Thrash for Magrudergrind, I really saw how harsh it is to listen to so much of the same thing. You get that warm feeling of amazement, but then it washes away after the tracks continue to pummel. I think that other genres outside of fastcore/grind/powerviolence are great, but I've found a little clutch of music that I love. Through my support, maybe I can help other people get into it, too. Sometimes, I look at record labels as curators (almost as if they're working for an art museum), so perhaps I'll find that next "puzzle piece" and introduce someone's new favorite band to them!

MRR: One thing I've always wondered is how anyone with average financial means can afford to run a label. I mentioned this subject to the drummer of Caulfield and we agreed that Dom Romeo of A389 records

(the label behind the last Caulfield LP) must have one hell of a running tab at the pressing plant! Seriously, how much cash/credit is required?

Well, I look at it this way: it costs a grand or a grand and a half to do an EP, a grand and a half or two grand to do an LP and when you start stacking up releases, you amplify it. Also, remember that if you don't run a distro, no one wants to order it from you unless you have other records they want. It all requires some planning. Luckily, I've been doing this long enough that I have a good sense for things. I don't always listen to my senses, but sometimes those are the most rewarding stories to tell later. For instance, very few people were aware of the band Sex Prisoner (at least on the East Coast) until the EP that I released. That EP blew me out of the water. We have gone on to press 1,000 copies! It's the same story with the Rhino Charge EP that I did seven years ago. I love the cutting edge of music. Hell, I remember saying "no" to doing an Insect Warfare record once, just because they had no music online and I hadn't heard them yet!



MRR: The layperson's understanding of the music industry is that it's in serious decline. It's accepted knowledge that record sales aren't what they used to be and independent record stores have to shut their doors in frightening numbers. Commentators argue that the "business" has shifted to the internet, which would theoretically auger well for online distros such as your own. Let's not forget about downloading, however, which has been increasing rapidly every year and has been deemed by "those who know" as the way of the future. Bluntly, how does *To Live A Lie* remain afloat in such a grim environment?

I respect the direction that this question comes from, but there are quite a few things that I don't look at my label as. My main, overarching concern lies with the music. If I tried to work with bigger bands in order to make more money just to stay in the game, I would have failed my main objective. I will run this record label into the ground if people decide they don't care about the music I love. At that point, I can go about my life as a music fan again and things will be a lot easier. Fortunately, I don't run a storefront where I have to carry 40 albums just to get by (and where I live, I'd have to, unfortunately). I must say that I have the utmost respect for Mom and Pop record shops across the country. They are the DIY of the music landscape I deal with a distributor that runs on DIY values and supplies my records to those shops.

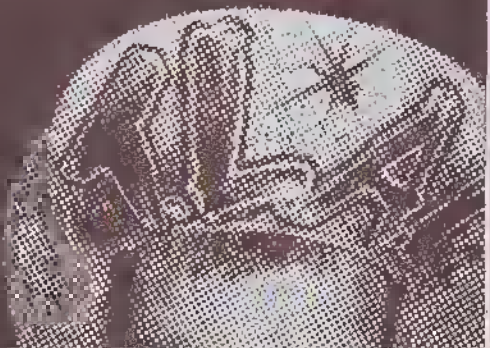
Honestly, I feel like downloading won't hit DIY too hard. Through downloading, people can hear the record and decide if they like it; they'll realize how limited each run is and, presented with that information, finally conclude if they should purchase a physical version online or at an independent record store. That's part of the logic, but also I've found that people involved in this type of music are very real people and will actively support it. The biggest impact of downloading ultimately affects CD sales. Why would someone put out a CD if music fans will just choose to download it and skip buying it? TLAL still releases CDs; the main reason is to get them overseas. Trading and selling CDs overseas is huge and I love it. I put out CDs every now and then mainly for this purpose. I feel like bridging the gap internationally is great. Additionally, people who don't own a record player are super happy to see someone use this format.

MRR: Let's talk about the forthcoming *Crusher 10"* by Magrudergrind, which you are set to release in the United States. Given the controversy surrounding both the band and the release (due to Magrudergrind's dealings with Scion, the Toyota-owned car company), did you ever have second thoughts about putting *To Live A Lie* squarely in the middle of that contentious debate?

I never once thought about this, actually. My feeling about the 10" is that it is the perfect disconnect from any "bad" that this car company could have done to DIY grindcore. In truth, I think *Crusher* is Magrudergrind's finest album and I'm proud to be putting it out as they intended it. I've been friends with the band from day one of my label; I know where they're coming from and I've never seen any weird, money-grubbing aspects to their personalities. In all reality, if they hadn't gone through that debacle, many people might not have heard of them, so people wouldn't have learned about the release and ended up finding the real DIY version. Fans that have been around since Magrudergrind's beginnings can now get the noncommercial version, too. Either way, it's really win-win. I got the original version of the 10" just because it's awesome, and that company didn't make a dime from my purchase. I also have the French DIY version on Bones Brigade/Kaotoxin. Magrudergrind has the backing of some larger DIY labels, but I know for a fact that they've said "no" to sketchy big-name deals in the past, so I really believe that their Scion affiliation was a move to help the average Joe Grinder get a free jam. All that aside, I'm not entirely sure that my budget would have allowed them to record at such a high level with Kevin Bernstein and then have the tracks mastered by Scott Hull, which the affiliation did enable them to do.

MRR: You've released a lot of records/CDs/tapes (and various other things) over the years. What are you proudest of and why? Please don't say that all the bands are like your children and it's impossible to choose between them! There has to be one project that stands out.

It's hard! I don't want to offend anyone here. I think the proudest moments are the ones that I never imagined releasing, such as the *Assholeparade* record, or the *Capitalist Casualties/No Comply* split. I'm also proud of releases where the music turned out incredibly well, such as the *Sex Prisoner EP*, *Magnum Force EP* or *Beartrap EP*. I've been stoked for months about the *Crusher* release and I have a little information, so I'll go ahead and leak that I'll be doing the upcoming LP by the Kill. I'm freaking out about that one. It's a tough question; every jam I do is awesome...hahahah I'm also very lucky that I've never done a record and later heard about the band being sketchy. No regrets, no resentment, only a ton of love for musicians, friends and people working hard together in the scene. I've always felt a lot of love in the times that I've put out local bands like *Thieves* and the upcoming *Trch Runner LP*. North Carolina isn't a hotbed of grindcore and powerviolence as you'd imagine, so when I do touch on local bands I feel a lot of love back and forth!



MRR: What's coming up in 2012 for To Live A Lie? I know you're doing a tape for Suffering Luna and there's talk that you're releasing a book on To Live A Lie as well.

The book is taking quite a bit of work; I'm laying it out myself. It is #6 in the Manchild series by punk-related comic book author/O.G. punk personality Brian Walsby. I've scanned most of the pages myself and created layouts for interviews, as well as assembled the project through InDesign. If it looks bad, it is entirely my fault. I'll just list each release I have coming out so I don't blabber on forever. I have some projects that aren't quite up yet, but this is what should be out soon: (ed's note: the list was four times as long, but by the time this went to print, most of it had already been released)

TLAL76—Decayed Race/Angst split tape

TLAL79—Nashgul/Malpractice Insurance split 7"

TLAL89—Ohulu Youth TBA tape

Additionally, I have some secret stuff planned up until TLAL100 (which will be the TLAL Volume II Comp, featuring several of my favorite fast hardcore/powerviolence bands—including some local ones).

MRR: Are you still playing bass in your powerviolence band, Iron Crow? Does Iron Crow have any live shows planned in the foreseeable future? Any talk of a follow-up to your demo, such as a debut 7" or a split with another band?

Well, that band ended abruptly. There were some interpersonal issues and the band just kind of fell apart, not to mention the drummer moved away for school. Our guitar player is in a new band called Abuse, who play music that isn't too far from what we were doing with Iron Crow, except with perhaps an even heavier Crossed Out/Suffer sound to them. Iron Crow had talked about doing an EP, but things were severed a little too early. I would have liked to put something out with the band past that poorly recorded tape.

However, I still play in No Comply. Readers might recall that No Comply was originally from St. Augustine, Florida and active in the '90s, but the band has now transformed into a recording project. We have two really amazing split records planned, which are on the hush for now. The band is going back to five drums (unlike the first EP I appeared on). Sporadically, I still do my noise-grind project Don Garnelli and I recently released a non-TLAL-related tape. It was professionally done with no label backing and it's the best material to date. DxCx is on hiatus until I have more free time. I've been putting my feelers out here in town about possibly doing a fast hardcore band, but I just don't have a lot of extra time lying around. I may be doing a doom/drone/noise collaborative band with Christophe (who I mentioned earlier as being in Abuse and ex-Iron Crow).

MRR: You've made it a point to help keep print zines alive. You distribute them at your web store but, more importantly, you've created zines of your own, one of which I helped out on. Please tell everyone about the different zines you've done. Are print zines still important/relevant/viable?

Well, flying back to my youth, I always preferred DIY zines to large, full-color, glossy mags (minus skate magazines, of course). I liked the aesthetics better. I did a few totally uneventful ones when I was young, including a zine about skateboarding/computer exploits. Fastcore Photos materialized when I started taking pictures a few years back and encountered the concept of a photocopied photobook for the first time. I thought, "Wow! It never occurred to me to produce a magazine of just photos." I had always been interested in getting pictures in MRR and Profane Existence, but hadn't thought to do a fun DIY project focused solely on my pictures. My old roommate helped me mega on Distort Raleigh (local house show zine)—as well as the two issues of Fastcore Photos—by doing the InDesign layouts and teaching me the basics of that software. He helped with 90% of the Don't Be Swindle layout. I kind of took everything and finished the rest of the project (again, with huge help from you, James, as the editor; I was more of a curator/organizer). I incorporated everything I'd learned to date, added a mixture of knowledge about InDesign and applied it to putting together Brian Walsby's Manchild #6 book. It's a killer book—overall, it's been a super rewarding project. In a world where everyone is stuck in the blogosphere and on Facebook, an honest zine or book is amazing and I feel like it lasts. To further my belief in keeping things cheap, DIY and free to those who really want them, I provide PDFs of all my zines. Manchild #6 may have to be a paid download to honor the author (who spent all that time making so many awesome drawings), but I want it to be fully available online, too.

MRR: You talked a bit about one of your past "day jobs" in the first issue of Don't Be Swindle. Where do you work these days? Are you pulling some serious late nights after work in order to complete all your creative projects and record label duties?

No serious late nights if I can help it, but it definitely involves some planning, especially to stay a well-rounded person. Some weeks I have to do work every day after work. Occasionally, I've taken the web store down to have some breathing room, but after that, it's nice to be busy again. It is completely a passion of love. I'm an I.T. geek by day; I work for North Carolina State University with a group that focuses on security. It is a great place for me. At my last job, I tried to cram as much label stuff in at work as I could because that was where my passion was but, now that I love my job, I don't want to be disrespectful and I separate the two as they are meant to be. Ironically, a lot of my label principles (maintaining the DIY ethic and keeping prices low on records) also translate very well into the working world.

MRR: Thanks for the interview, Will. Please tell everyone where they can find To Live A Lie and its web store on the internet, as well as any other places to follow/contact the label. As XBRAINLAX put it, Hail Fastcore!

Much love and deep respect to everyone out there reading this. Thanks again, James and huge respect to MRR for everything they've done and continue to do. Here are the places TLAL is on the Internet that matter:

tolivealie.com
facebook.com/tolivealie
tolivealie.bandcamp.com

